

Message Text

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SUBJ: CONGESTION OF RELIEF GRAIN AT DJIBOUTI, ASSAB AND MASSAWA

ROME FOR FODAG

REF: A) ADDIS 1773 (NOTAL), B) STATE 58689 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: RELIEF GRAIN REMAINS PILED UP IN PORTS OF DJIBOUTI, ASSAB AND TO LESSER EXTENT MASSAWA. PROBLEM CENTERS AROUND LACK EFFECTIVE STORAGE AND ONWARD DISTRIBUTION CAPABILITY WITHIN ETHIOPIA. NEW RELIEF COMMISSIONER APPEARS READY TO MOVE TO RESOLVE SITUATION ALTHOUGH TECHNICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS ARE SUBSTANTIAL.

1. DJIBOUTI. MARCH 21 ETHIOPIAN HERALD CARRIED AFP DISPATCH FROM DJIBOUTI EXPRESSING CONCERN OF DJIBOUTI PORT OFFICIALS THAT OVER 12,000 METRIC TONS (MT) WHEAT AND MAIZE DESTINED FOR ETHIOPIAN DROUGHT AREAS REMAINS AT QUAYSIDE. ACCORDING TO AFP, GRAIN ARRIVED IN DJIBOUTI EARLY FEBRUARY AND ONLY TRANSPORT
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AVAILABLE IS FIVE CAR FREIGHT TRAIN CAPABLE OF MOVING 125 TONS

PER DAY. GRAIN REPRESENTS GREATER PART OF 6,100 MT PRC WHEAT AND 8,500 MT MAIZE PURCHASED BY WFP IN KENYA. HEAVY RAINS HAVE BEGUN IN DJIBOUTI AND ALTHOUGH STOCKS ROOFED OVER, IT IS FEARED THAT DAMPNESS WILL DAMAGE GRAIN.

2. IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF, ETHIOPIAN ASSISTANT GENERAL DIRECTOR OF RAILROAD BERHANOU ABEBE PAINTED BLEAK PICTURE ABILITY RAILROAD RESOLVE DJIBOUTI PROBLEM. IN HIS VIEW, CORE OF PROBLEM IS IEG INABILITY TO ORGANIZE COMPLETE SYSTEM FOR DISTRIBUTING GRAIN TO AFFECTED AREAS. BERHANOU SAID RAILROAD RECEIVED ONLY MARCH 22 INSTRUCTIONS WHERE TO DELIVER GRAIN BUT THAT NO STORAGE FACILITIES EXIST ALONG RIGHT OF WAY TO HANDLE AMOUNTS OF GRAIN INVOLVED. HE WAS INFORMED THAT MINAG INTENDS CONSTRUCT ONE 500 MT SILO EACH AT MODJO AND DIRE DAWA WHICH INADEQUATE ACCOMMODATE PRESENT MUCH LESS FUTURE RELIEF SUPPLIES ARRIVING THROUGH DJIBOUTI. BERHANOU NOTED THAT EVEN WITH DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS AS TO WHERE TO DELIVER GRAIN AND IF SILOS IN FACT DID EXIST AT LEAST ONE AND PROBABLY TWO MONTHS WOULD BE REQUIRED TO CLEAR PORT OF DJIBOUTI. HE REPEATEDLY NOTED IT WAS NOT LACK OF GOOD INTENTIONS THAT PREVENTED IEG FROM MEETING CHALLENGE BUT EXISTENCE OF BASIC TECHNICAL PROBLEMS OF ORGANIZING TRANSPORTATION, STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION NETWORK NECESSARY TO MOVE CURRENT LEVELS OF RELIEF SUPPLIES TO TARGET AREAS. BERHANOU SAID IT WAS HIS OPINION THAT ARRIVAL ADDITIONAL USG RELIEF GRAIN AT DJIBOUTI WITHIN NEXT MONTHS WOULD ONLY COMPLICATE ALREADY SERIOUS STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION SITUATION ALONG RAILWAY.

3. IN PRESS CONFERENCE MARCH 22, BERHANOU ALSO CITED DISTRIBUTION AND STORAGE PROBLEMS AS HOLDING UP RELIEF GRAIN MOVEMENTS FROM DJIBOUTI. UNDERLINING RAILROAD'S BEST INTENTIONS TO RESOLVE SITUATION HE SAID WITHOUT PRECISE INSTRUCTIONS AS TO WHERE TO MOVE GRAIN (WHICH HE HAD SOUGHT SINCE FEBRUARY 14 AND ONLY RECEIVED MARCH 22) RAILROAD COULD DO NOTHING. GRAIN COULD NOT BE LOADED ON FREIGHT CARS WITHOUT IMMOBILIZING THEM AND THIS RISKED PARALYZING RAILROAD. BERHANOU ALSO NOTED THAT GRAIN CHOKING DJIBOUTI WAREHOUSES DISRUPTING ETHIOPIAN EXPORTS. (DURING PRESS CONFERENCE BERHANOU DID NOT DIRECTLY CRITICIZE IEG).

4. ASSAB. SITUATION PORT OF ASSAB AGGRAVATED BY HEAVY RAINS WHICH HAVE CAUSED SEVERE DAMAGE TO SECTIONS OF ASSAB-KOMBOLCHA ROAD. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IHA ANNOUNCED ALL ROAD TRAFFIC TO AND FROM ASSAB IS PRESENTLY AT STANDSTILL AND NO INDICATION GIVEN WHEN ROAD WOULD BE REOPENED ALTHOUGH IHA REPORTED TO BE WORKING AROUND THE CLOCK. REP MAJOR ETHIOPIAN TRUCKING CONCERN SAID CONGESTION SITUATION ASSAB REMAINS SERIOUS AND HE DOUBTS PORT WOULD BE CLEARED BEFORE SEPTEMBER. HE SAID PROBLEM TO DATE STEMMED FROM LACK ADEQUATE TRUCKING CAPACITY, BUT RAINS WOULD MAKE MOVEMENTS DIFFICULT FOR NEXT FEW MONTHS PARTICULARLY IN WOLLO.

5. MASSAWA. USAID OFFICIALS VISITED MASSAWA PORT MARCH 13. BY THAT TIME, OF 8,500 MT FAMINE RELIEF AND FOOD FOR WORK WHEAT OFFLOADING BEGINNING MARCH SOME 5,000 MT WHEAT REMOVED WITHIN TWO WEEKS (RATE TWICE NORMAL PORT OTTURN CAPACITY) DUE TO UNUSUALLY LARGE NUMBER TRUCKS AVAILABLE MASSAWA. THIS RESULT OF ERITREAN SECURITY SITUATION WHICH PREVENTED TRUCKS FROM GOING INTO WESTERN ERITREAN LOWLANDS FOR NORMAL SHIPMENT OF SESAME CROP EXPORTS. AS RESULT ABSENCE CENTRAL RELIEF COMMITTEE PERSONNEL FOR ARRIVAL SHIPMENT, 2,000 MT FOR TIGRE FAMINE RELIEF NOT EXPEDITED UNTIL MARCH 15. AT PRESENT FINAL 200 MT OF TIGRE GRAIN REMAIN IN PORT. RECENTLY 2,000 MT WFP FOOD FOR WORK GRAIN ARRIVED MASSAWA AND IEG REPORTEDLY NOW HAVING DIFFICULTY REMOVING REMAINDER TIGRE AND NEW WFP GRAIN.

6. COMMENT: PORT CONGESTION AND LACK INTERNAL TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE REMAIN SERIOUS PROBLEMS. DJIBOUTI PORT COULD BE RAPIDLY CLEARED IF STORAGE AND ONWARD DISTRIBUTION NETWORK FUNCTIONING WITHIN ETHIOPIA. CLEARANCE PROBLEM ASSAB AND MASSAWA APPEARS DUE PRIMARILY INADEQUATE TRUCKING CAPACITY. UNLESS IEG AND DONORS MOVE DECISIVELY TO DEAL WITH THESE PROBLEMS SERIOUS RISK FUTURE GRAIN SHIPMENTS WILL PILE UP IN PORTS. WE BELIEVE THESE TECHNICAL PROBLEMS STILL COMPLICATED BY LACK STRONG ORGANIZATION WITHIN IEG CENTRAL RELIEF COMMITTEE TO DEAL WITH COMPLEX TASK OF ORGANIZING TRANSPORT, STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS. NEW RELIEF COMMISSIONER, HOWEVER, APPEARS READY TO TAKE ACTION IN THESE AREAS. WE WILL CONTINUE MONITORING PORTS AND INTERNAL DISTRIBUTION TO ASSESS IEG EFFECTIVENESS IN DEALING WITH TECHNICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS. WYMAN

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